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## ***Deaf Senior Education for Active Living***

**Project Number: 2020-1-IT02-KA204-079227**

IO1 - Deaf Senior needs in Europe:  
Analysis and Abstract

**NATIONAL COUNTRY REPORT - AUSTRIA**

Organisation: equalizent



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## NATIONAL BACKGROUND

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To date, no study focusing on the situation of deaf seniors has been undertaken in Austria. Therefore, the information that is presented in this section derives from information about the deaf population in Austria in general, combined with information about all seniors living in Austria.

### **Situation of deaf people in Austria**

The population of Austria is 8.9 million.

Precise data on the number of people with hearing impairments is difficult to come by for several reasons. In 1996, the number of people who were deaf, hard of hearing or late deafened was 456 000. This number included 51 000 people who had great difficulty hearing even in a quiet environment, as well as 10 000 people who were fully deaf (Statistik Austria 2016).

The data from the statistics collected in 2007 and 2015 vary greatly and show consistently falling numbers of deaf, hard of hearing or late-deafened people. In 2015, 2.1% of the population in Austria aged 15 or over (around 157 000 people) was affected by a permanent hearing impairment, including 19,000 people (0.3%) with serious hearing problems. In 2007, 2.8% of the population, aged 15 or over, (around 198 000 people) was affected by a permanent hearing impairment.

The fall in the number of deaf, hard of hearing or late-deafened people is explained partly by the fact that in 2015, the survey was conducted by telephone, so that people with severe hearing impairments could not be interviewed (Statistik Austria 2015).

Most deaf children are born to hearing parents (approximately 90%) which means that when they start school, they are often already at a disadvantage to their hearing peers because they lack an adult language role model. These disadvantages often last until old age. In Austria, the prevailing trend in teaching, even in special schools, is oralistic. There are only limited places in inclusive schools, and only some of these schools provide lessons in sign language. Even then, most lessons are taught orally with the provision of sign language interpretation for deaf students, rather than being prepared and adapted to the needs of hearing impaired pupils, and taught bilingually (in written / spoken German and Austrian Sign Language) (Österreichischer Gehörlosenverbund 2015).

Not only is unemployment considerably higher amongst people of working age who are deaf, only 35% of those who find work, find placements on the first labour market (Witaf 2012). This has also consequences in old age because people undertaking low income jobs during their working life also receive little pension and are in danger of suffering old-age poverty.

### **Situation of seniors in Austria**

On 1 January 2020 in Austria, 1 693 627 people (19% of the population) were 65 years or older. We can make a gestimate (guess / estimate) of the number of deaf seniors based on the percentage of deaf people in Austria as a whole (approx. 10,000) – this means there are 1 900 deaf seniors in Austria.

The paper “Aktiv und gesund Altern in Österreich” meaning in English “active und healthy aging in Austria” (Antony et al 2019) gives a great overview of the situation of seniors living in Austria as it summarises many different studies and statistic. Therefor this paper is the basis for the following overview.



According to a publication of Eurostat, Austrians over 75 years old rate their life-satisfaction with 7.6 out of 10 points (Eurostat 2019a). Life satisfaction depends on gender (men are a bit more satisfied) and the degree of education (higher education leads to more satisfaction).

Concerning their state of health, 62.4% of Austrians over 65 state that they suffer from long lasting health problems (Eurostat 2019b). Based on self-evaluation, 44.6% of respondents over 65 say they have a very good or good state of health. One survey claims that nearly a quarter of all people older than 50 are depressed. According to Eurostat, 5% of Austrians over 65 years suffer from symptoms of depression (Eurostat 2019c) and in the over 75 age group, the percentage may be as high as 29.6% (Amann et al 2018).

Nearly 70% of Austrians over 65 engage in physical exercise regularly (Eurostat 2019m). The amount of movement per week of people aged 60-69 is about 11 hours and for those over 70 only about 5 hours (IFES 2017).

Older people often have difficulties using ICT (Norman/Skinner 2006). The use of ICT declines with age, starting with the over 50s. In addition, the educational activity and the use of media have a large influence on the ICT use of seniors (Kolland et al 2011). Approximately 80% of Austrians over 50 have an internet connection, but only 47.8% of those over 75. There is also an additional difference concerning the level of education. The higher the level of education the higher the percentage of people with an internet connection (Kolland et al 2011).

The employment rate of people 55-64 is continuously increasing in Austria and was in 2017 60.1% for men and 42.8% for women (Eurostat 2019d). Generally, the higher the level of education, the higher the employment rate of people aged 55 to 64.

The official retirement age in Austria is 65 years for men and 60 years for women. In 2017, the average retirement age was 61.1 years for men and 59.2 years for women. The average pension for men was 1,918 € and for women 1,094 € (Statistik Austria 2019). At 37%, the gender pension gap is especially high in Austria.

55% of the population over 55 work as volunteers. The percentage in the age group 60-69 is especially high (58%). Even for people over 80, there is still a high rate of volunteering that only decreases at an even higher age (IFES 2016). A study found the following motives for volunteer work in old age "helping" (81%), "contact" (68%), "using own skills" (58%), "keeping skills" (44%) and "learning something new" (49%) (Kolland et al 2011).

Concerning further education, 8.5% of people aged 55-64 state that they took part in an educational or training activity within the last 4 weeks (Eurostat 2019e).

Seniors, especially female seniors look after people in need of care. Around 1/3 of caring relatives are in the age group 51-60 (Nagl-Cupla et al 2018).

Seniors receive support not only from relatives but also from neighbours and friends. The amount of support they receive decreases with age. Around 6% of people over 80 don't have any contact with their family. 2% have neither contact with family nor with other people (ÖPIA 2018). Very old people have a higher risk of poverty and loneliness (OECD 2017). According to Eurostat, 13.4% of people over 65 are endangered by poverty or social exclusion. Women are more severely affected than men (Eurostat 2019f).



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## FINDINGS

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### INTRODUCTION:

The aim of the survey was to find out the needs of deaf seniors to enable them to better participate in society and have an active live. Therefore, two different surveys for the target group of deaf seniors and professionals working with deaf seniors were developed.

As methodology, an online questionnaire was chosen as this format makes it possible to incorporate sign language videos. Due to the Covid-19 lockdown, in person meetings with seniors were impossible. The survey consisted of mostly closed multiple-choice questions but there were also some open questions. The survey started with some demographic questions and then asked about the topic of the needs of deaf seniors to live a more active life.

The online survey was available in written German and Austrian sign language. For the filming of Austrian sign language, we chose a native signer as moderator who is nearing retirement age so that his style of signing is familiar to the target group of deaf seniors. We ensured that signed moderation was slower, used appropriate signs for the target group (like all languages, Austrian sign language has evolved in recent decades for various reasons and so age-appropriate signs were used). Letters were added to the videos (graphics) to make the answer possibilities clear and visual and enable deaf seniors to orient themselves more easily

The survey was shared widely within the Austrian deaf community. For a start, deaf employees of equalizent were asked to forward the questionnaire to their elderly deaf relatives. Existing contacts to different deaf associations were used to ask them to forward the survey. In addition, deaf associations all over Austria offering meetings for deaf seniors with whom equalizent hadn't previously cooperated were contacted. The survey was disseminated on DESEAL and equalizent Social Media channels.

As the survey was conducted during the Covid-19 lockdown, it was impossible to attend meetings of deaf seniors and go there to introduce the survey to them and help them fill it out. In Austria, many deaf seniors don't use e-mail or social media therefore it was difficult to gather their answers. This is also the reason why in spite of our best efforts we were unable to achieve the indicator of 40 deaf seniors as there were overall only 32 respondents. The indicator for professionals (20) was fulfilled as they are more used to completing digital surveys.

The survey was analysed through a simple statistical analyses. The results were then summarised and interpreted by the project team using their knowledge and experience of deaf people in Austria and the living situation of seniors in Austria (as described above).

### PARTICIPANTS:

#### Survey for deaf seniors

In the survey, there were 32 participants. 41% of them were male and 59% female (Figure 1). Most of them were aged between 60 and 80 years old (Figure 2).

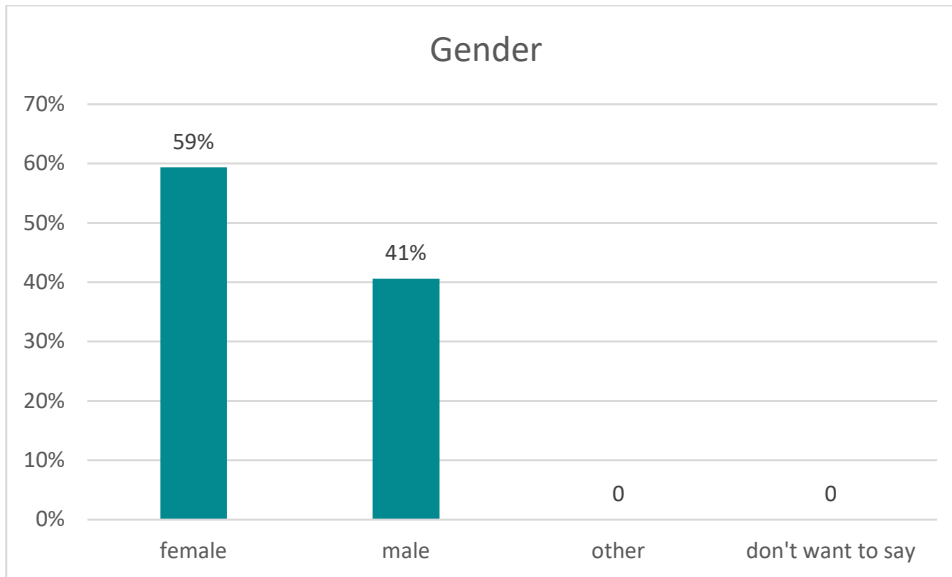


Figure 1: Gender of participants in deaf senior survey

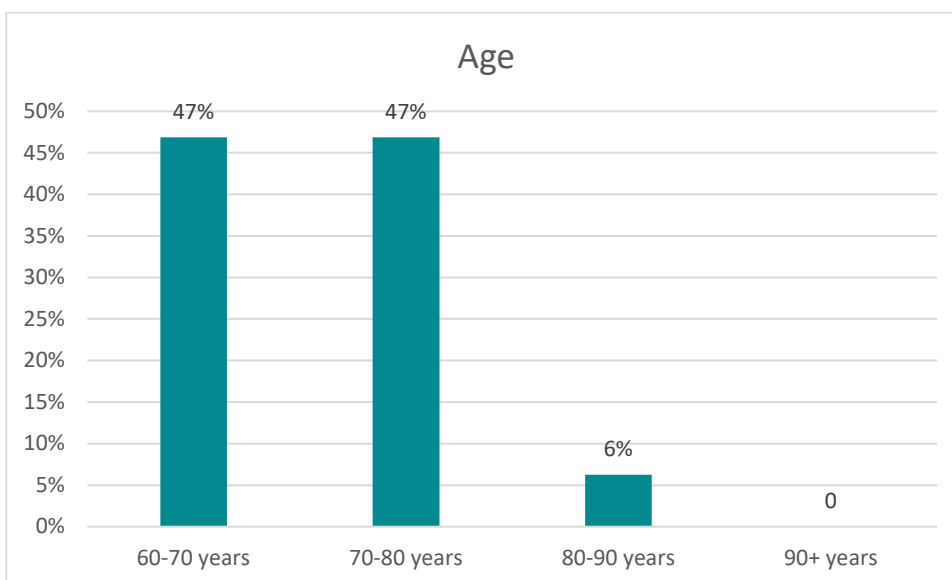


Figure 2: Age of participants in deaf senior survey

#### Survey for professionals working with deaf seniors:

In the survey, there were 20 participants. 25% of them were male, 75% female and 5% didn't want to tell us their gender (Figure 3). Concerning their place of work, most respondents work in a city with over 100,000 inhabitants (75%).

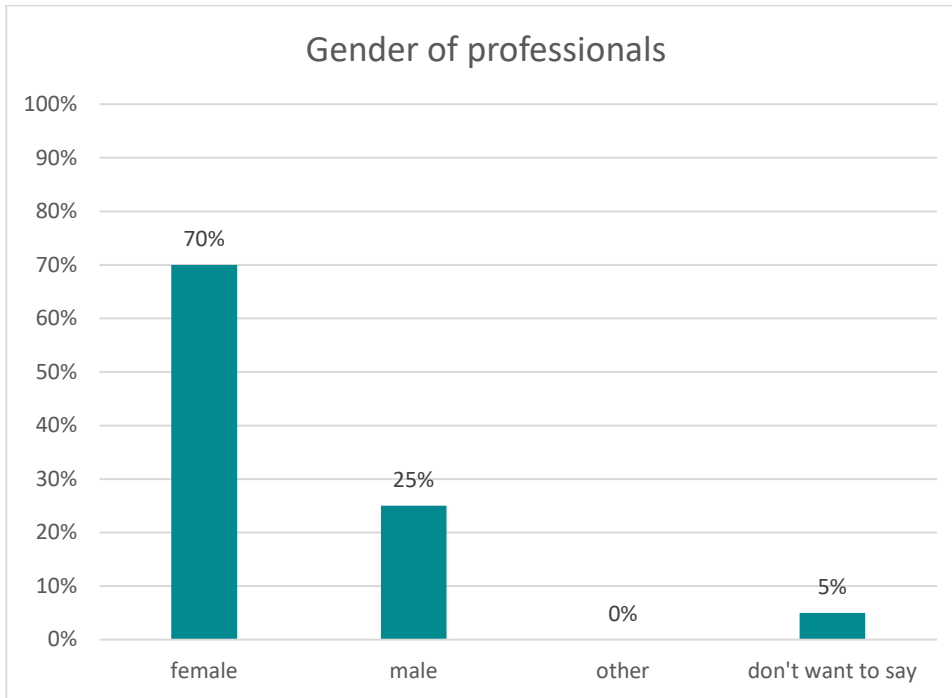


Figure 3: Gender of participants of survey for professionals

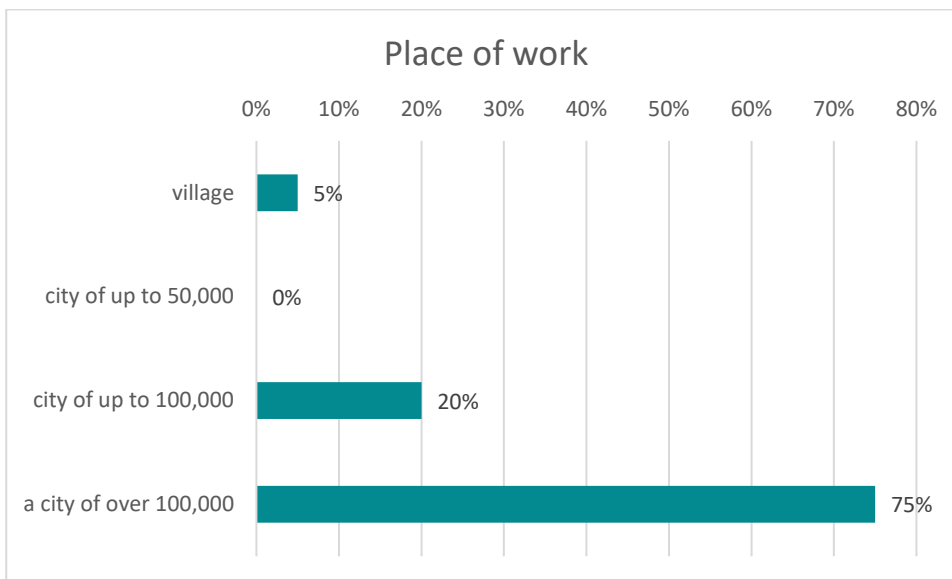


Figure 4: Place of work

Most professionals who took part in the survey worked with deaf seniors (60%), none of them with hearing seniors. 35% worked with other groups namely: people with disabilities, deaf students, both deaf and hearing seniors, adult educators, deaf people of all age groups, deaf youth and deaf adults (Figure 5).

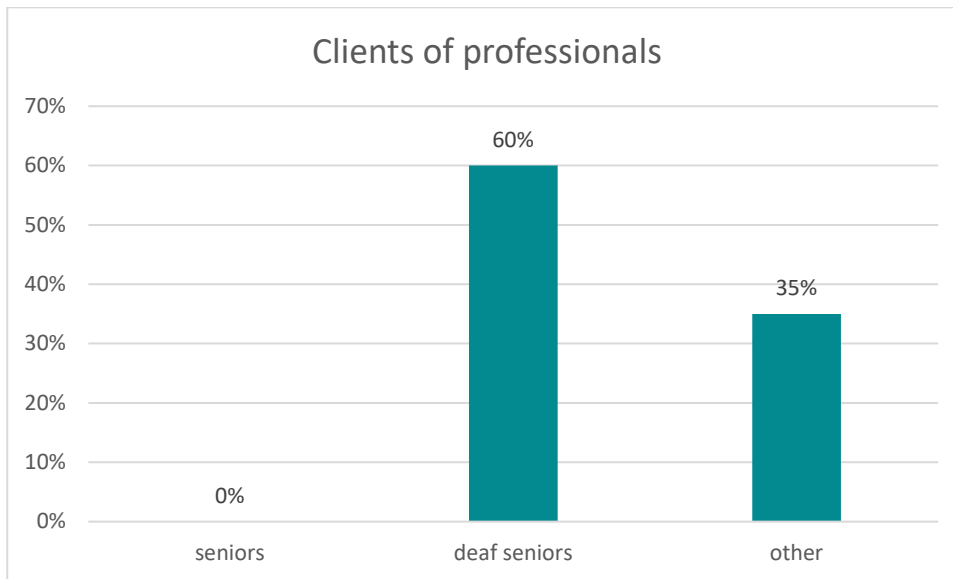


Figure 5: Clients of professionals



## SURVEY FOR DEAF SENIORS

First, we will analyse the results of the survey for deaf seniors.

### QUESTION NR: 3: What is your preferred form of communication?

Respondents were able to select several answers for this question. The most popular form of communication is Austrian sign language (ÖGS) at 81%. German (31%) and speech-accompanied gestures (LBG) (13%) are less popular (Figure 6). This strongly indicates that materials used for the activation and education of deaf seniors need to be in sign language.

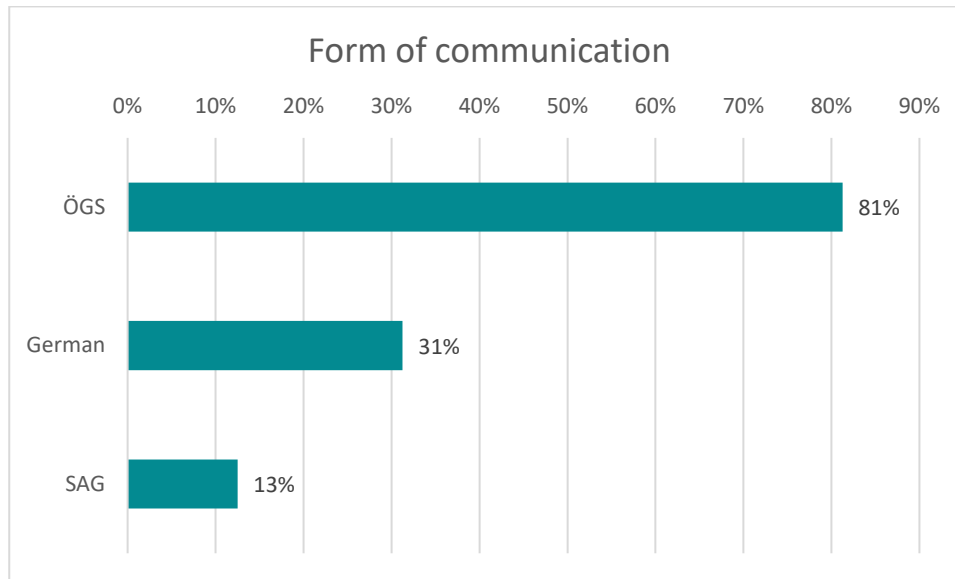


Figure 6: Form of communication

### QUESTION NR: 4: You live ..

Concerning their living situation, more than half of the participants live with their spouse (53%), followed by 22% who live alone, and 16% who live with a friend. Only 6% of the participants live in a retirement home and none of them in a nursing home (Figure 7).

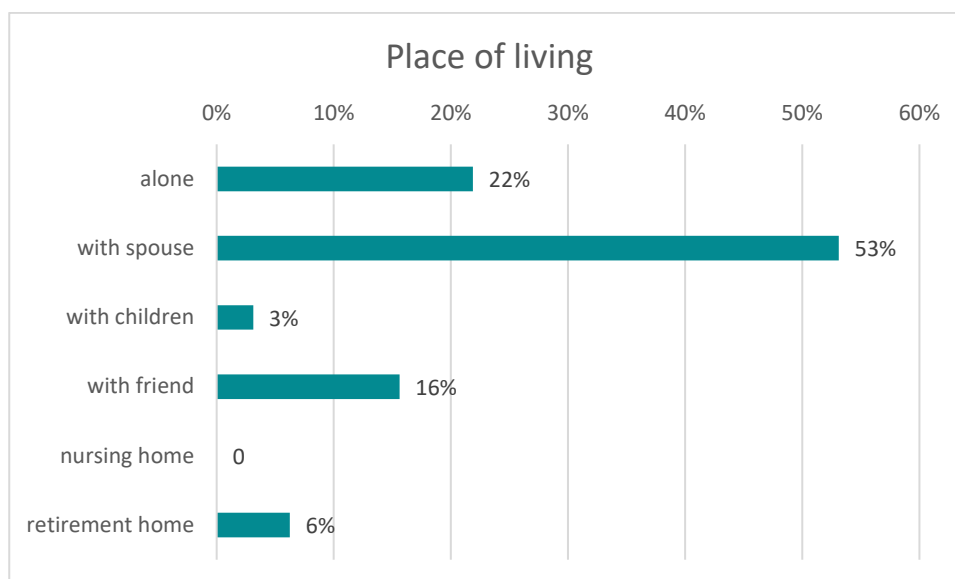


Figure 7: Place of living





**QUESTION NR: 5, 6 & 7: Are you able to go where you want to go?; If you marked “Yes”, how many times per week are you away from home?; If you marked “no”, why?**

84% of our survey respondents are able to go where they want to go (Figure 8). Nearly half of them go out daily (47%). Only very few (19%) go out less than 2-3 times per week. 6% don't go out at all and 13% go out once a week (Figure 9). Only some of the participants who don't go out gave their reasons for it. Those were: the Covid-19 virus, problems with walking and that it is too exhausting.

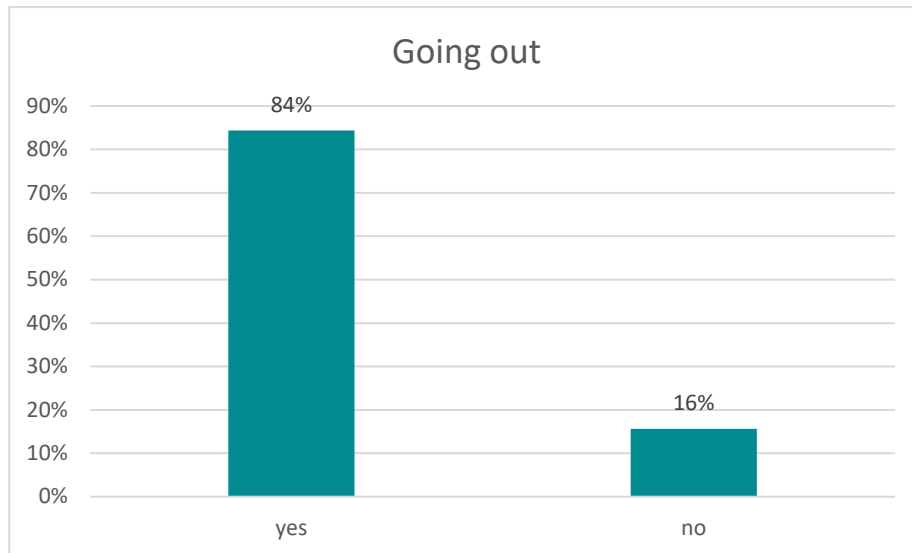


Figure 8: Going out

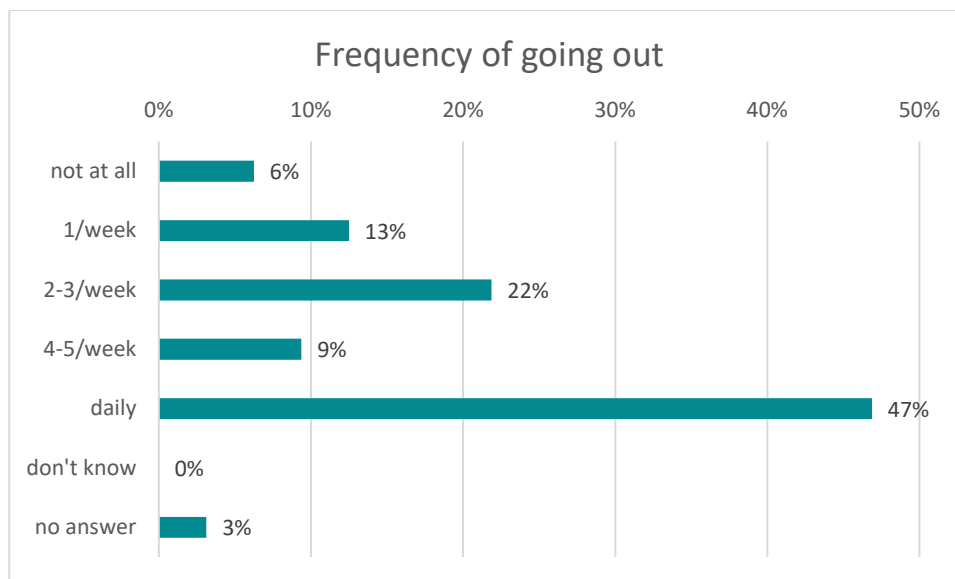


Figure 9: Frequency of going out

**QUESTION NR: 8: Why do you leave home?**

Concerning the reasons the respondents go out, the most popular reasons are doctors' appointments (75%) and shopping (81%). Meeting friends, going on trips, doing sport and volunteering are also popular. Only 9% go out to participate in courses (Figure 10).

The answers to this question show that the most popular reason why deaf seniors go outside are needs of the daily life, followed by social activities. Education isn't a popular reason to go outside.

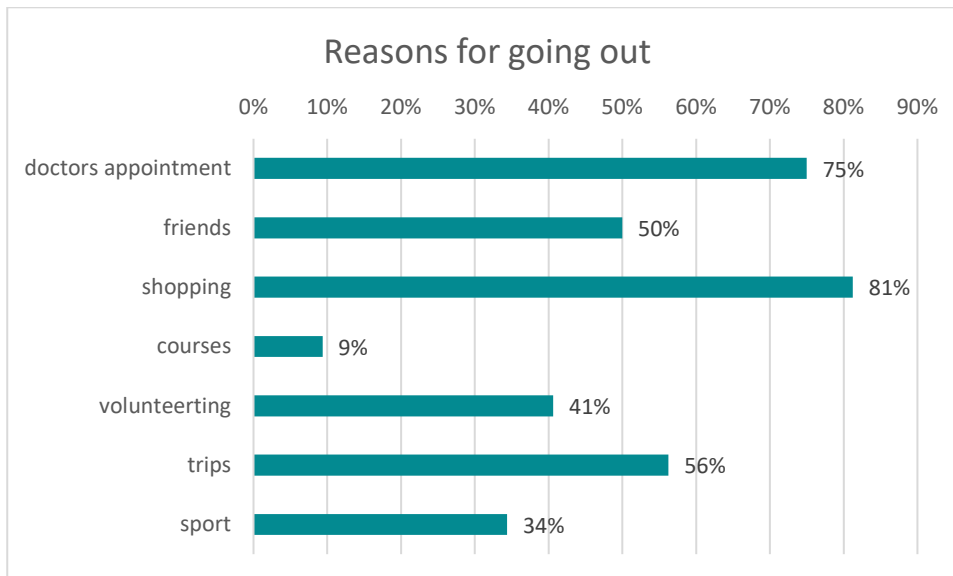


Figure 10: Reasons for going out

**QUESTION NR: 9 & 10: Do you have contact with other people in your daily life?; If you marked "yes", who?**

75% of respondents do have contact to other persons in their daily life (Figure 11). The most common contacts are family (75%) and friends (72%). In addition, more than half of the participants have regular contact to their local deaf club (53%). The seniors have less contact to people providing services to them (Figure 12).

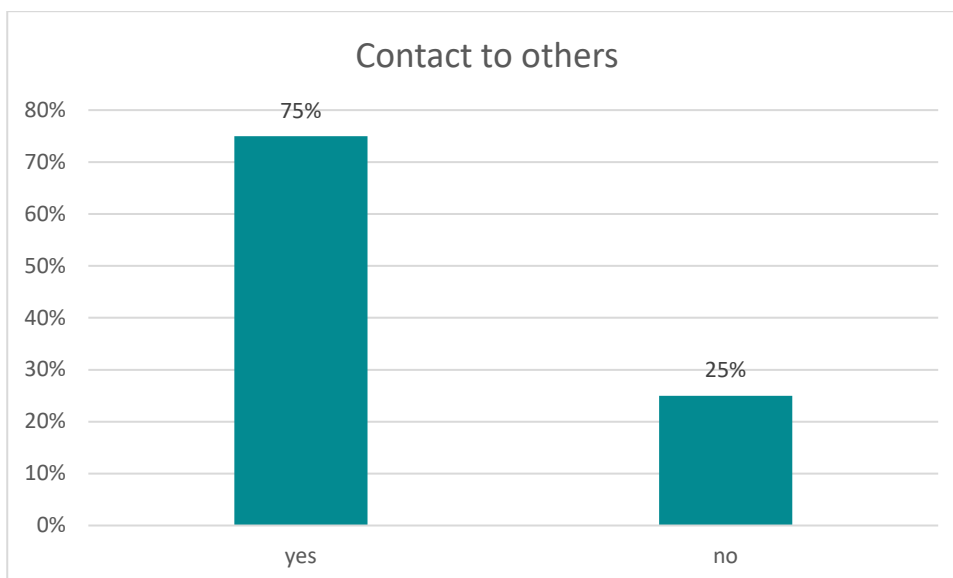


Figure 11: Contact to others

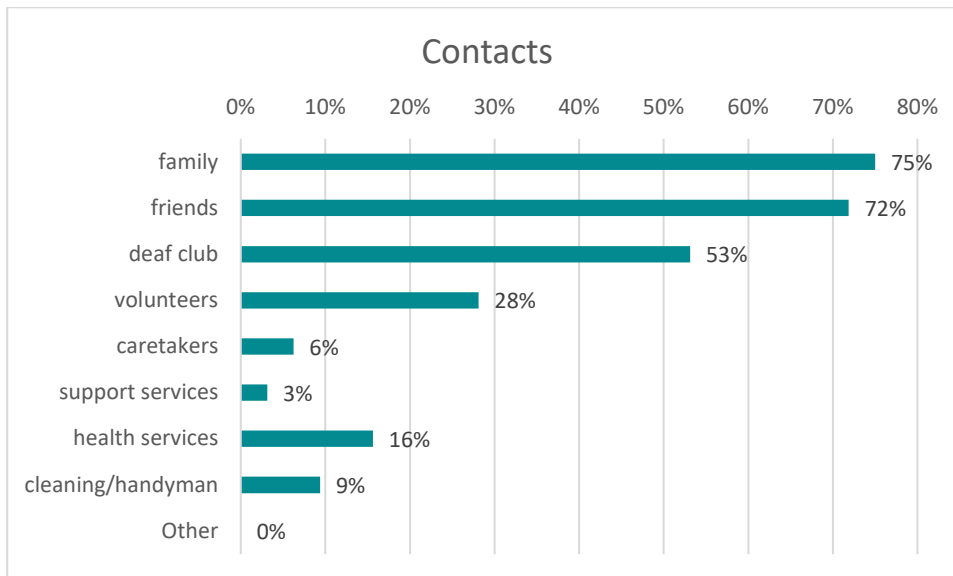


Figure 12: Contact persons

**QUESTION NR: 11: How would you describe your wellbeing at the present time? Do you feel mostly ...**

For this question, the participants could choose several of the answers provided. By far the most popular answer was well (78%). In addition, other positive emotions like happy (28%) and comfortable (34%) were quite high. Negative emotions such as depressed or frustrated were only chosen by less than 10% of the respondents (Figure 13).

In conclusion, you can either say that the respondents are quietly content with their current state of wellbeing, which corresponds to the results of the research presented in the section on the national background. But it has also to be taken into consideration that this question might be influenced by social desirability and the respondents don't want to admit if they have negative feelings.

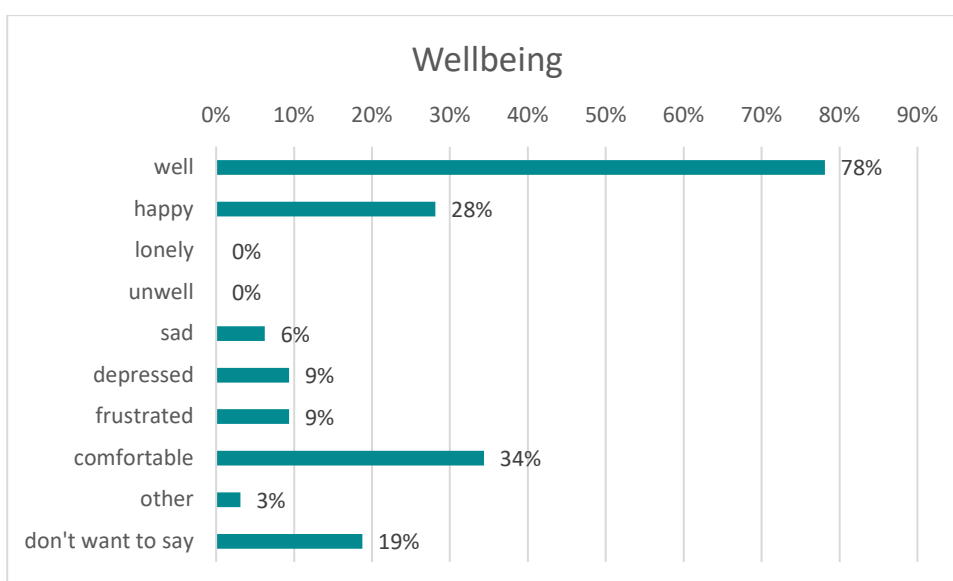


Figure 13: Status of wellbeing



QUESTION NR: 12, 13, 14 & 15: Do you know of education and activation opportunities in your locality?; If you marked “yes” do you use them?; If you marked “yes” which one did you use?; If you marked “no” which activities, you would like to do?

More than half of the respondents (53%) know of education and activation opportunities in their locality (Figure 14) but only 26% also take part in them (Figure 15).

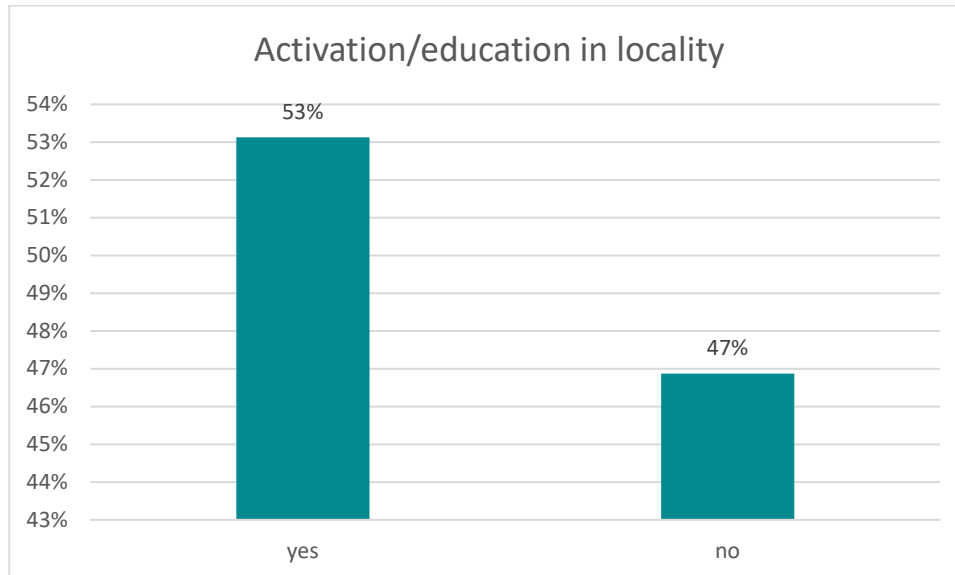


Figure 14: Knowledge about activation/education in locality

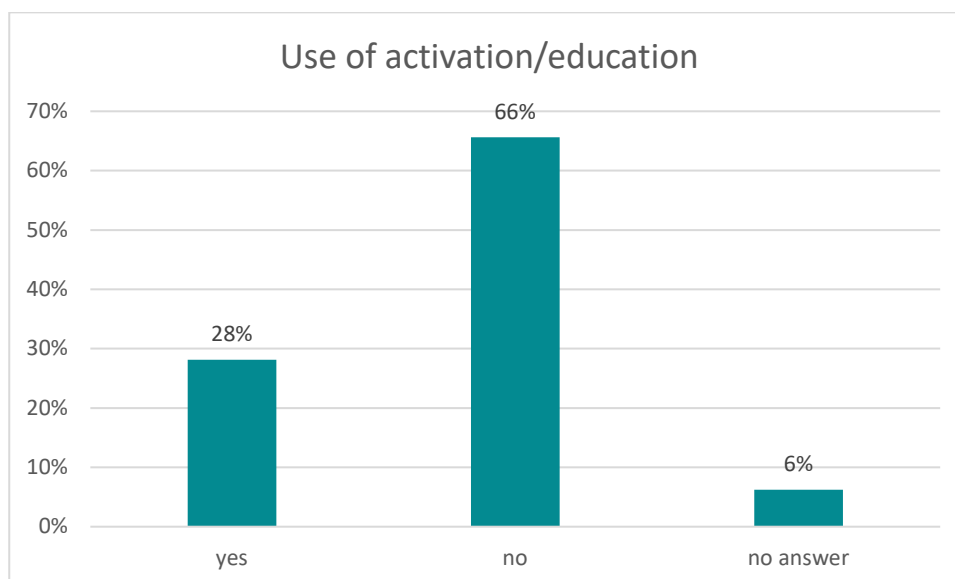


Figure 15: Use of activation/education in locality

Of the existing opportunities, sports (38%), volunteering (22%), gardening (19%) and tourism (16%) are most popular. Training, ICT, language classes or health training are nearly not used at all (Figure 16).

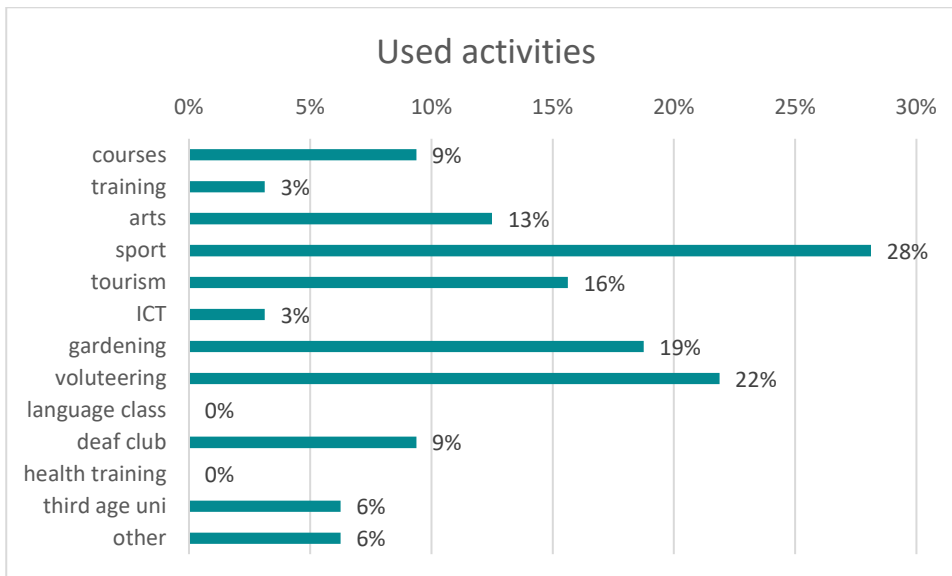


Figure 16: Type of activities used by respondents

Looking at the activities that the seniors would like to practice but that currently aren't offered in the locality, sports (50%), tourism (47%), deaf clubs (41%) and playing cards (41%) are most popular. The topics ICT (6%), language classes (6%) and sign language classes (6%) are less popular, with the all other options ranking between 0 and 3% (Figure 17).

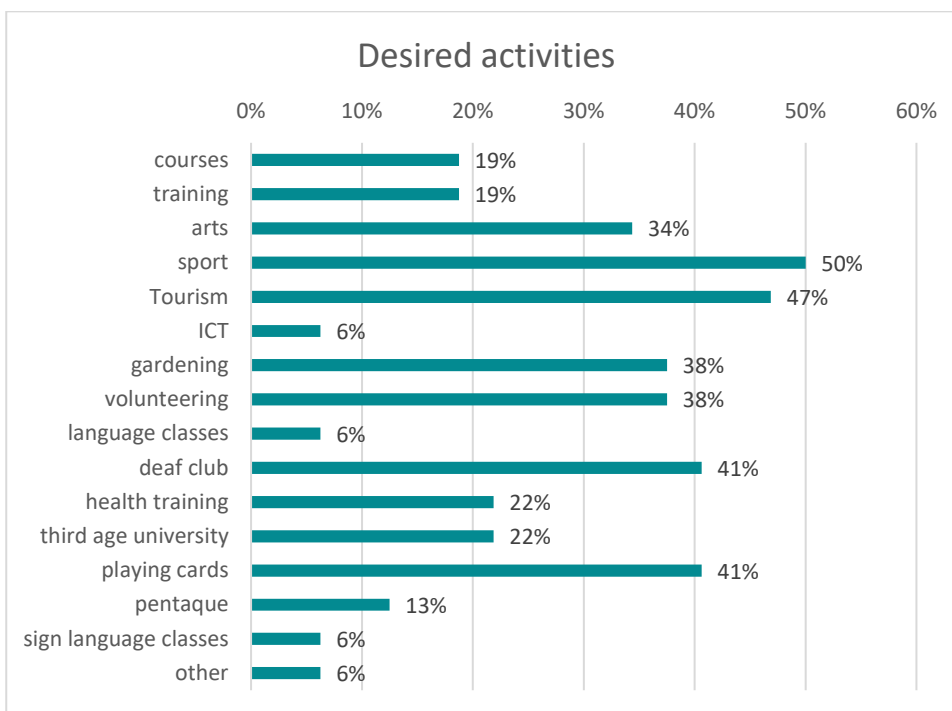


Figure 17: Unavailable activities that respondents would like to participate in

## QUESTION NR. 16: What activities usually make you happy or satisfied?

This was an open question. All the responses can be summarised by pointing out that the respondents are happy and satisfied either when they have social contacts (to friends, to family, etc.) or they participate in an activity that they enjoy (sport, hiking, games, gardening, deaf club, etc.).

## QUESTION NR. 17. Would you like to connect with other deaf elderly people in Europe?

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More than half of the respondents said they don't know if they want to connect with other deaf seniors in Europe. 34% said yes and only 13% said no. It's interesting to wonder why so many respondents aren't sure about this question. Maybe they don't know because it isn't specified how exactly the contact could take place e.g. only contact via video conference or personal meeting somewhere (Figure 18).

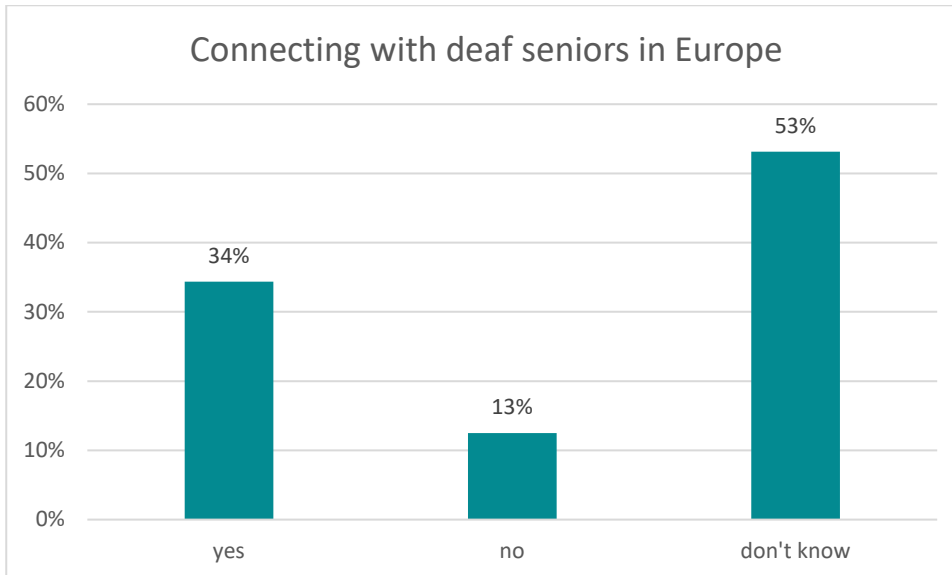


Figure 18: Connection with deaf seniors in Europe



## SURVEY FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH DEAF SENIORS

QUESTION NR. 4, 5 & 6: “Are there any opportunities for education and activation available for deaf seniors in your local area?” If you marked "Yes", please choose which one: If you marked "NO" which activities would you like to be available for deaf seniors in your local area?

For question 4, most of the professionals (80%) stated that there are opportunities for education and activation available, only some denied it (20%) (Figure 19). This answer was to be expected as they are professionals working with deaf seniors and therefore they are aware of what possibilities exist.

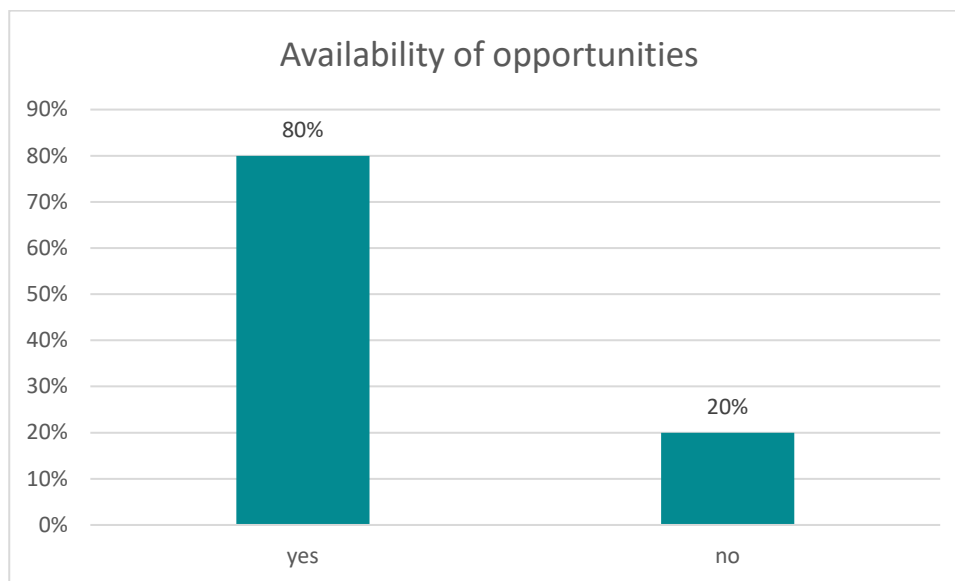


Figure 19: Availability of opportunities

Concerning the kind of opportunities that are available, most professionals stated that there are local deaf clubs (95%). There is a big difference between the popularity of this and the next most popular answers followed which are; courses (50%); volunteering possibilities (50%); and sport (40%). There are nearly no opportunities offered for seniors to occupy themselves with ICT, gardening or third age universities (Figure 20). Other existing opportunities that were mentioned by the respondents are: exchange between young and old people.

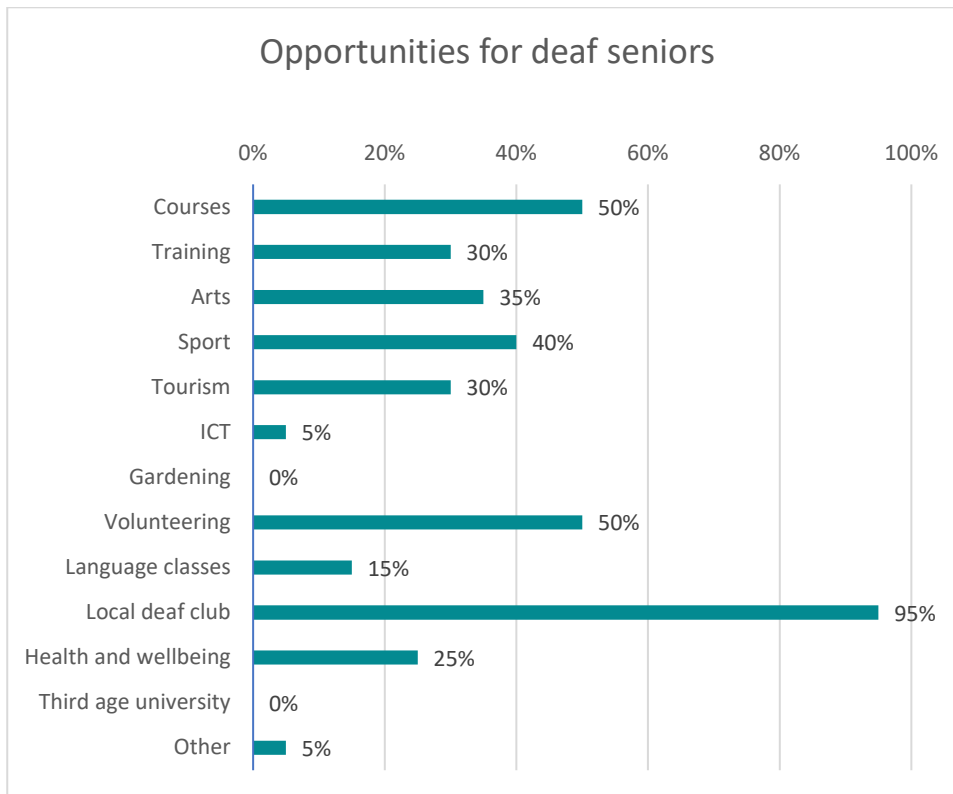


Figure 20: Existing opportunities for deaf seniors

Concerning what activities the professionals would like to have for deaf seniors, art (50%), sports (50%), tourism (50%) and identification of isolated seniors (50%) are the most popular answers. Most of the other answer possibilities are in a medium range between 30% and 45%. Only language classes have a score under 20% (Figure 21). Other opportunities that were suggested by the respondents are: support for deaf seniors in old people's homes who live in rural areas and have few social contacts, deaf seniors should have the same support as hearing seniors and support in the field of ICT (online banking, shopping, finding of information, official channels).



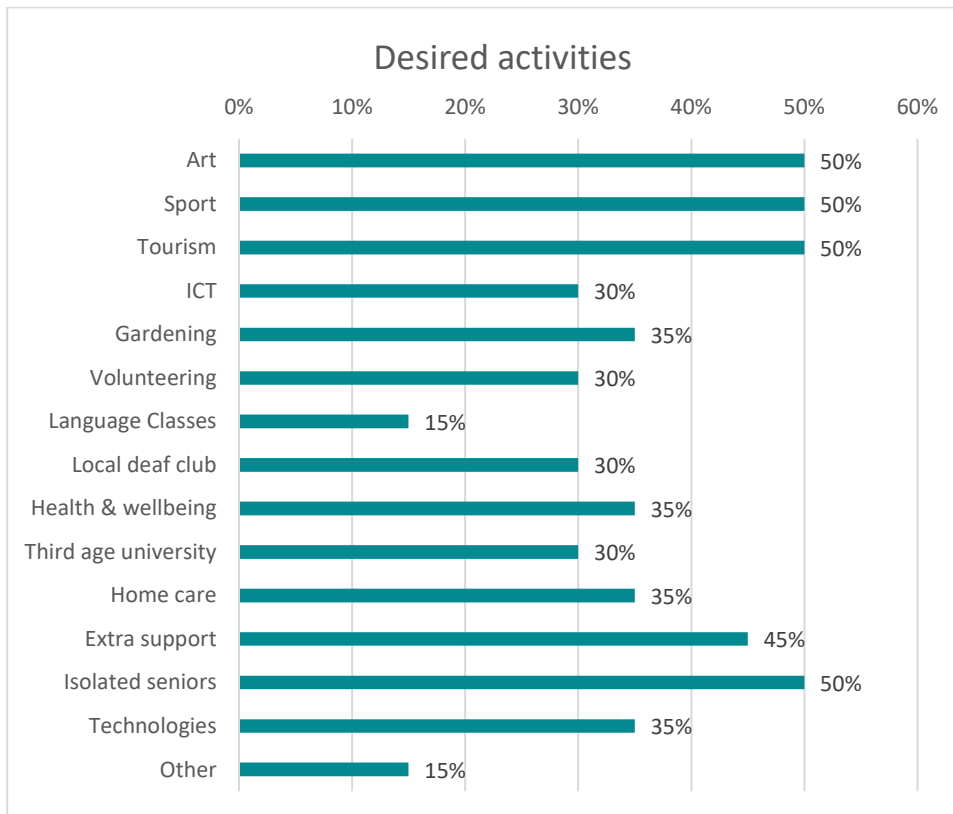


Figure 21: Desired activities for deaf seniors

**QUESTION NR. 7: Thinking about your local resources, what changes are needed so that deaf seniors can participate more willingly and more often in social life?**

This was an open question and the answers that were given can be grouped into the following categories:

- a) Demands for more accessible offers, either directly in sign language or with sign language interpretation available, as well as more financial support for sign language interpretation and communication assistance.
- b) Retirement and nursing homes should have offers more suitable to the needs of deaf seniors especially employees with knowledge of sign language and possibilities for people living there to participate in social activities.
- c) Support for lonely seniors such as buddies our visiting services.

**QUESTION NR. 8: Which of the following methods have you used to support deaf seniors in developing their psycho-social activity and their independence?**

Concerning the methods that professionals use to support deaf seniors giving a sense of purpose (70%), social interaction (75%) and physical activities (75%) are most popular. The less popular answers are helping with a positive body image (25%) and dining together with others (15%). Other methods that are suggested in the open question are: Looking for fitting offers by other providers/professionals (Figure 22).

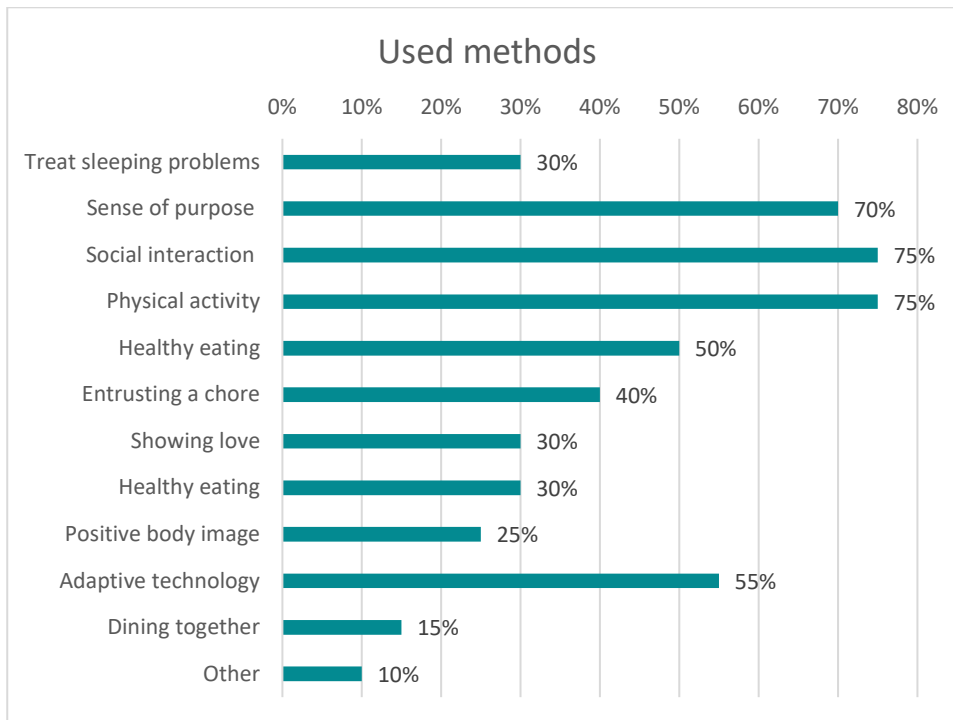


Figure 22: Methods used to support deaf seniors

**QUESTION NR. 9:** In the field of education and activation, what kinds of activities, methods, and forms of support are most important and need to be developed?

This was an open question and the following answers were submitted:

Independence, courage to ask questions, willingness to learn (also new technologies), commitment for others, endurance, talks in sign language, exchange with other seniors, promote body awareness, promotion of self-confidence, warning about fake news, movement and exercises, nutrition, health, artistic activities, doing handicrafts, game afternoons, museum visits, computer course, brain training, creativity.

Overall, it was remarked that many planned activities often fail because of lack of financial support or funding. There were claims that more nursing homes or other forms of accommodation in which sign language is used should be available. Moreover in general, all activities, methods and support that are available for hearing society should be also available for deaf seniors.

**QUESTION NR. 10:** In the field of education and activation, what kinds of activities, methods, and forms of support are most important and need to be developed?

This was an open question and the following answers were submitted:

Interactive activities, learning by doing, a lot of practical orientation, enough repetition, individual- and group training, activities that are fun and promote community, as many activities as possible, exchange possibilities with young people, walks, game afternoons, artistic workshops, computer courses, brain jogging, sportive activities, possibilities to learn something new, activities depending on the needs of individuals, support with the usage of new technology e.g. social media, new communication forms, nursing homes and divers accommodation forms in Austrian sign language, everything that is offered in hearing society.



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## CONCLUSION

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The results of the two surveys seem to be in line with the national background concerning the living situation of deaf people and all seniors in Austria.

Unfortunately, participation in the survey by deaf seniors wasn't as high as originally expected. This was due to the Covid-19 lockdown in Austria and the lack of possibilities to introduce the survey personally to deaf seniors and help them to fill it out.

Overall, the results from both surveys (deaf seniors and professionals working with deaf seniors) are in strong alignment with each other. A recurring theme that runs through all results is the importance of sign language. Social activities take place for the most part in deaf clubs, activities offered in sign language or with sign language interpretation are desired, and also social and health services should be available in sign language.

Therefore, the DESEAL project will be able to contribute to filling this whole by developing information videos in sign language.

Challenges for the further development of the DESEAL project could be the low use of internet or interest in developing skills in the IT field by deaf seniors. Most of the outputs of the DESEAL project will be digital but if deaf seniors don't have the possibility or interest to access it, this could be problematic. Therefore, the cooperation with professionals working with deaf seniors and the development of the guidelines and training materials for professionals working with deaf seniors will be key to familiarising the main target group with the outputs.

Most seniors that participated in the Austrian survey are between 60 and 79 years old. Most of them are still active and go out every days for activities in connection with the needs of the daily life or social activities. The respondents mostly described their overall wellbeing as well, happy and comfortable. This signifies on the one hand, that they are confident with their current life but feeling this way is also a good precondition to have motivation and energy to try out something new (like the possibility offered through the DESEAL project).

Most respondents know about activation and education possibilities in their context but also most of them don't use them. The survey doesn't give an answer to why this is the case. A possibility could be the lack of possibilities in sign language or with sign language interpretation.

The respondents were mostly interested in the topics of sports, tourism, deaf clubs and playing cards. These are activities mainly related to leisure, physical activities and social contacts. Seniors in Austria expressed less interest in topics related to education.

The professionals working with deaf seniors mostly state that there are offers for activation and education available for deaf seniors. The kind of activities they think are most needed are art, sports, tourism and identification of isolated seniors. These are once again activities mainly related to the field of leisure and social contacts.

The methods used most often by the participating professionals are giving a sense of purpose, social interaction and physical activation. The professionals are very clear about what is needed to improve activation and education possibilities for deaf seniors: more offers in sign language or with sign language interpretation available, retirement and nursing homes that better suit the needs of deaf seniors and visiting services and companions for isolated deaf seniors.



Overall, the results give a rather clear and unified picture of what is needed for deaf seniors to be more included and empowered: more offers in sign language in fields related to social interaction and physical activities.

Nevertheless, the equalizent team members feel that the inclusion of topics related to digital literacy is important in the materials to be developed in the DESEAL project as the low participation in the survey clearly demonstrated that this is a field in which many deaf seniors are really lacking competences and access.



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